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ABSTRACT

The changing role of the external researcher is explored in the context of two action research projects in Malaga (Spain). The first project was an evaluation of a trade school program for disadvantaged young people in a low-income rural area of Spain. Researchers began as friendly evaluators in a democratic evaluation of the program's first phase, which was not regarded as successful or very important by program developers and participants. As the program moved into its later phases and the trade school curriculum developed, evaluators were asked to take on the role of pedagogical advisors by the trade school staff. The researchers' role eventually became one of support without intervention. In the second project, which took place in an innovative rural elementary and secondary school, the role of the external evaluators was defined by their own expectations and by the teachers who felt themselves to be responsible for program evaluation. Reflection on both projects makes it apparent that the relationship between practitioners and outside researchers varies considerably in different cultural settings. For success in external evaluation, the roles of all partners need to be defined clearly. Collaboration must be understood as a process of building in a democratic way. Difficulties in educational change in the Spanish educational culture are discussed. (Contains 20 references.) (SLD)

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Forms of collaboration. The flexible role of the researcher within the changing context of practice.

Paper to be presented at AERA 1997

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We would like to offer our reflections on the varied and flexible roles the researchers have to take on when they are involved in action research projects within changing and complex contexts. This flexibility is a requirement for preserving the purpose of *building a collaborative relationship in order to help improve the quality of practice* through human development and institutional change.

The basis for these reflections is the discussions we, as a group of researchers, have had during the development of two action research-like projects in Málaga (Spain) within the European Research Network called MOHD (Management for Organizational and Human Development). An exploration of action research methodology in each of these two very different professional settings demonstrates very well how strongly action research methodology is determined by the culture of the participants and their institutions. In this paper we are going to focus our reflections on the changing role of the external researcher.

Ways of collaborating in different contexs

1.- Fahala project.

The first research project began as a one year *program* developed in Fahala Trade School during the 1994-95 academic course, and it was called *integrated action*. It continued later as a two-year main program, called *trade school*, that began in November 1995. *Fahala* is a trade school for marginal young people in a deprived rural area in Málaga province. The teachers are professional workers, experts in different vocational specialities, without any pedagogical training.[1]

The philosophy of the program can be summed up as follows: "Retrieving young people, retrieving the trades, retrieving our heritage". *The first statement*, putting forward the retrieval of young people, is a bold acknowledgement of the social and educational disaster in which adolescents and young adults, who have failed at school, find themselves, especially those from the poorer and disadvantaged social groups. *The second point* makes reference to the need of retrieving and reassigning value to the role of the craftsman in all of its varieties and domains. Retrieving these trades by training young people in them and adapting them to modern-day demands, means the rescue of part of our already semi-lost culture as well as an opening into the world of production, the realm of art, creativity and personal fulfilment. *The third aspect* of the project's philosophy alludes to the retrieval of the community's artistic, cultural and ecological heritage. Namely, retrieving young people and the trades for and by means of the retrieval of the natural and cultural wealth of the self-same social community.

Despite the real fact that in our initial negotiation the head of school wanted us to begin with an external evaluation, over the length of the academic course, our intervention was brought about not only by the communication and exchange demands of the probing nature of the project, but also by our unavoidable involvement in the reality of the school itself and the frequent and

[1] 1 In this research project has been working as external researchers Montserrat Ogalla y Angel I. Pérez

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pressing requests of the teachers and students. So, the research could be described as an action research-like project.

a) The development of the researcher's role.

The first year ('acciones integradas' program):β The delicate position of the evaluating function

We began to define our role as that of friendly evaluators involved in a democratic evaluation (Macdonald 1983). Ourmain purpose at this first stage of the project was to give everybody in the school the opportunity to give their opinion and perspective about the development of the vocational program they were involved in, and the diverse interpretations we were collecting from each of them: our observations and our own interpretations. Our intervention was limited to the collection of actual and multi-levelled information from every participant and giving it back to them, as a means of getting a more accurate and complex interpretation of the conflict situation they were living in.

The general feeling among the staff and the students as regards the program "Acciones Integradas" was one of failure. This failure was perceived in the human and day-to-day aspects of the program and in the cultural development of the students rather than in their vocational training per se. The last six months of the "Acciones Integradas" program were marked by a climate of distrust and confrontation between the teaching staff and the students. Various factors contributed to this situation:

- From the very beginning, the "Acciones Integradas" program was viewed as a temporary and minor project; a transition stage between the two important Trade School projects. Thus, the staff's attitude was not quite the same as before. The contrast with the deeply satisfying development of the first trade school program (92-94) was very evident. Student participation in the life of the school was almost nil. The model of democratic participation was looked on by the students as merely a formal and imposed system, but not as an instrument they could use to obtain what they really wanted.

- Frustration, because the initial economic expectations for the development of the program were not met, but, even more so because student remuneration failed to materialise. This was, in our opinion, the changeover point and it had an economic root.

- As regards our intervention, the teaching staff believed that one of the reasons for the experience of failure was our role as external evaluators; both what we did and did not do. The staff formed two opinions: First, the external researchers as observers of every day life and as interviewers in informal situations were very close to the students and listened to their demands. The students leaned on the research group's support to enlarge their complaints and demands. Also, they went on to ignore the official channels of participation and replaced them by trusting in the researcher (who was both young, and a woman) which, as the institutional communication channels dissolved, caused a breakdown in communication within the staff.

Secondly, we as external evaluators did not give the staff the support they needed, that is, knowledge, techniques and procedures to deal with their teaching, and specially, with relationship problems. They thought that this role of external evaluator, i.e. giving only progress reports about the past, was not the kind of collaboration they needed. They did not need information and instruments for understanding or clarifying the problems they were confronted with, after they had dealt with them. They needed advice and guidance before the problems appeared.

From democratic evaluation to didactic advice. The changing role of the researcher to reinforce collaboration

As a consequence, the initial negotiation as regards our participation in the Trade school biyearly project, which was to begin in November 1995, met with serious resistance on the part

of the teaching staff; it required a long process of clarification; and it meant substantial modifications in our role and function within the program.

In order to avoid some of the flaws in the previous stage, the teaching staff proposed that our role should be, to begin with, one of supporting and advising them. They were very aware of the fact they did not have any specific training as teachers and that they did not have time to train themselves. So they wanted from us, as directly as possible, advice and guidance about what to do and how to resolve their teaching and relational problems and difficulties. They wanted us to take the role of *pedagogical adviser*. They were, at that moment, neither interested in democratic evaluation with student involvement, nor in external observation. They wanted a group of experts to help and guide them in their work. At most, they would entertain the idea of a process which would involve looking into the problems together, analyzing them and designing intervention strategies to confront the difficulties. But they also wanted to avoid, at least at the beginning, any contact on our part with the students.

We tried to make them understand that we did not have a solution to their problems, because we thought there is no single correct solution for each problem, but we could help them to build experimental ways of going about their work, analyzing the situation together, reflecting about this and proposing experimental strategies of intervention. We suggested an open process of an action research-like process, where the advising role would be integrated within a common project of shared inquiry. We openly manifested our rejection of the concept of advising as the giving out of external recipes. Instead, we suggested considering it as a learning process in practice, by analyzing, experimenting with alternatives and thoughtfully evaluating processes and results. This could be thought of as a way of developing their practical wisdom or situational understanding, a way of getting the training they felt they needed, a powerful means of professional development as Elliott (1991) proposes. Although they asked us to act as consultants/advisers/counsellors we were not being restricted to a directing, unidirectional role: we were continuously inviting them to think by giving open proposals or "hints" about the areas which might need attention.

We considered, and so made it known to the teaching staff, that the change of role they demanded from us was to be viewed within a much greater shift in the conception of the teaching project. We let them know that in our opinion their teaching project was becoming academic and shifting towards control and profitability, in part to prevent a failure similar to the previous program, in part to meet the sponsor's demands. They accepted this remark and justified it with the following two reasons:

- Participating in an open and democratic project with heterogeneous groups as regards interests and skills was an added difficulty for them, given their current professional inexperience as teachers. They felt better prepared for working within a controlled and hierarchical model. They said that as they became more confident and in control of the situation they would begin to open up.

- The external pressures. The Spanish Trade Ministry and the European Union which funded part of the project demanded a high profitability rate measured in terms of professional skills acquisition and employment, and not in terms of acquiring human development or improved personal conduct.[2]

In the following staff meetings it became apparent that this academic and controlled approach was endangering the original objectives and principles of the Trade School, which were based on "the retrieval of youth, the trades and the national heritage". The climate in this first school had been so strong in sharing and learning that, besides academic recovery, the school had

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[2] for this important issue see the relevant paper of B. Macdonald How education Became Nobody´s business (1996) is a radical, rational and emotional cry against the actual damage of current educational systems. "Now we face a hostile state and a closed system, whose only acknowledged needs are for management and surveillance. The business of the schools is no longer a business we want to be in" (p. 248)

achieved human and professional retrieval of the most marginalised young people in the town, those with whom ordinary educational had failed. At this point we all had become aware that the actual demands of external sponsors were in contrast, and even in contradiction, with the original pedagogical philosophy and the explicit purposes of the trade school project, and that we have to work while knowing about and dealing with these contradictions.

The demands for profitability and control, for example, had a clear influence on which students were selected for the current program. The teaching staff, although aware of the school's function as a platform for the retrieval ofdeprived and marginalised young people, not only chose the more able people, but they also excluded those who were more likely to adopt antisocial behaviour, and so be difficult to integrate in the learning process. The smooth running of the project and the known professional limitations for dealing with difficult cases demanded such exclusions.[3]

On the other hand, the external demands and pressures from the institutions financing the project was, in everybody's opinion, undermining the very foundation of the program because of the implicit contradictions. The instructors' contract specifications made clear their role as specialist workers, but they did not make any reference to their teaching responsibilities and obligations. The timetable of 40 working hours per week did not meet their needs as teachers, nor allowed for some of this time to be reserved for organising their teaching, discussing the process, marking and designing tasks, coordinating meetings, etc. So, they were a teaching staff with teaching responsibilities, but they had neither the required training nor the time to acquire it, nor the legal status of a teacher. It is difficult to believe that the concrete policies of those who finance these projects are really compatible with the initial objectives and philosophy of the trade schools.

But it is also true that despite all of these external and internal constraints and limitations, the cooperative process of reflection built on the positive attitudes of the teachers, their sensitivity, their strong involvement in their work, and their actual commitment to improve their practice through collaborative learning, have progressively opened space for an action research-like process. So, during the year 1996 we have been working in promoting participation and communication between colleagues as the best means to eliminate their resistance to a more open and democratic pedagogical intervention, to experiment with new forms of integrating the human and culture dimension with the vocational development in the students and overcome barriers to change. We have not been working as yet with the students, because the staff wanted us to act as their consultants only. We have been in a role similar to what Somekh calls "support without interference" for the teaching staff without interfering with students.

2. Totalan Project

In October 1995 we began an action research process in a school with an extensive background of innovative activities. It is a small school (6 teachers and 80 students, with ages ranging between 3 and 14) located in a semi-rural and socio-culturally depressed area.

Although there are important differences between the teachers (as regards how long they have been in the school and teaching in general, or the type of training received, etc.)[4] they form a

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[3] In our opinion, the attitude of the teaching staff and the head of the school at the beginning of this project towards the pupils had changed significantly. In the first Trade School and at the beginning of "Acciones Integradas" they were more committed towards a more "problematic type of student, the one with less social opportunities. Their attitude at the beginning of this new stage -probably caused by their bad experience during the Acciones Integradas project- was very strict. One of their openly admitted purposes was to prevent any contact between the new students and those from "Acciones Integradas". The staff immediately spotted the "problematic" students - the problem being their attitude in class or their being mentally handicapped, which would mean lower performance on the work site - and expelled them.

[4] Two of them arrived at the college 14 years ago, one teacher has been teaching for just 2 years and the rest for 4-5 years. Some of them are members of an innovative group: MCEP -Cooperative Movement for the Popular School-. Over the years the two oldest teachers have been the ones who have preserved the philosophy and the

strong team and their personal and professional relationships are stimulating and warm. This is due thanks to the human quality of each of these teachers, but even more to the fact that they share an important core of educational ideas; the meaning of school itself, of teaching, the role of the teacher, etc. Their philosophy is thus summarised by one of the teachers: "We are trying to create a relaxed school; without suffering from the urgency or the imperative to comply with previous educational programs. A school where the village children like to go or, at least, will not reject it. A school in which each teacher feels himself or herself to be a protagonist and to be doing creative professional work. An open school that has a positive impact on its environment, and that adapts itself to new social demands" (Alcalá, 1994, p. 192). According to this philosophy, the school is non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian as it is run on cooperative lines[5] . The responsibilities are equally distributed and all the decisions are taken by general consent. Such praxis is adopted both by the school decision-making bodies (among whose members are also parents and students) and by the teachers during their daily classes.

If we think of the three attitudes considered to be indispensable for a reflective action, that is, open mindedness, a sense of responsibility and self-learning (Zeichner, 1993, p.46) it is certain that these teachers are reflective and they have a long background of investigation experiences. As a common way to work, they have identified problematic areas, analyzed them, documented them, experimented with them and, on numerous occasions, offered them to other teachers by making them public[6] . They also share the experience of course planning, consolidated and audited over the years. Such an atmosphere has led one of the two outsiders to write in her diary that "in comparison with the experience I have had in other schools, it seems to me that this group is continually producing information about the school world and the task of the teacher".

a) Working together

The research has been undertaken from the initial consideration that action research is " the systematic study of the attempts carried out by the participants to change and improve the educational practice via their actions and reflection upon the effects of such actions" (Ebbut, 1985, p.156). This is the reason why the research has been planned out according to the principles agreed upon with the teachers: "the research is in the hands of the teachers: they will choose the situation-problem to work on, as well as the working pace, the phases, etc.". Therefore, the external researchers neither have imposed anything nor have given any suggestions about this subject. They have only suggested that it could be interesting to deal with a problem common to the whole group.

The six school teachers and two external researchers[7] have played a major role in the present project. We began by analyzing the most important dimensions to understand the problem identified by teachers: Improving the work carried out with heterogeneous groups. What are the factors that makes this a problem? How does the problem reveal itself? Up to now, what working methods have been used with the heterogeneous groups?

The meetings of the group -usually every two weeks - have been the place for the action research to develop. The aims of most of these was the analysis of both the information taken

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pedagogical practice of this school (Kirk, 1990). This is a very important function if we consider that the school has never had a permanent teaching staff during the last 10 years.

[5] The way the teachers understand and practice cooperation can be found in the curricular project developed by the teachers themselves and published as Alcalá, M et al. (1992) Hacer la Escuela. Una propuesta de proyecto curricular para el primer ciclo de primaria. Sevilla. MCEP.

[6] They have published some books and also make regular contributions to some specialist magazines where they present and analyze their work.

[7] In this research project has been working as external researchers N. Blanco and Franca Rossi (CEDE, Rome, who was paid by MOHD as a travelling researcher).

from the teachers' records and the one gathered by the external researchers via observation and the analytical memorandum carried out[8] . This was the time at which decisions were taken, papers were analysed and ideas were discussed. During these meetings, the participants always discussed the matters in a relaxed and democratic way, thus generating a free-flow of ideas and topics (De Gauna & al., 1995).

The role of the external researchers has been defined not only by their own expectations and ideas but also by those teachers who have confided in them. Our commitment to the teachers was mainly gathering information, evaluating alternative procedures to be applied, and proposing new ways and hypothesis for moving forward. The work was developed according to the idea that the investigation belongs to the teachers. External researchers will participate in it, but with the understanding that their role was to provide support, not to lead the project or decide its duration.

What are the teachers' demands? They are not asking for "recipes." And in this sense, they do not envisage the external researchers as "experts." Rather, they need our "external" view, new "eyes" to see certain aspects they might have overlooked in everyday practice. However, this attitude is not free of contradictions. If someone offers their collaboration or proposes a shared working process, it may be difficult to avoid the expectation of them having something to offer. Collaboration is not always viewed in terms of gathering information, clarifying problems, or searching together for possible hypotheses to explore, etc. It is also thought of as presenting solutions.

Thus, the teachers expected us to offer them new perspectives, radically different from theirs, and to detect "mistakes" in their work which would help them to change. But this viewpoint is unsound. If the work is based on collaboration, we cannot start from this assumption. The way to progress is not through the search for "mistakes" (in any case, what is right or what is wrong?), but through the offering of ideas and information to be shared, analyzed and understood. In this sense, we, the external researchers, have practised great caution, making sure that the identification of difficulties and alternatives for development emerged from the group discussions. Only as regards the methodological aspects to apply did we have a more leading role by proposing ways of gathering information. Thus, our contribution has been "diluted" within the collective. Our work has mostly pointed at cooperating in the search for answers to questions raised in the team. As a teacher comments: "You have tried to communicate and complete a job with us, based on what we already had and knew".

The communication and collaboration between teachers and external researchers has been based on three principles: exchange, respect and group. External researchers and teachers have collaborated as a group, based on mutual respect towards different ideas and views. The researchers made a strong point of respecting the ideas and experiences of the teachers and not imposing ideas, aims or meaning. This does not mean that there were not marked differences in the role both parties played. There was an "us" and a "them", for both teachers and researchers, but this did not have negative connotations. It is precisely the fact of being different, of having different roles that makes collaboration possible and richer. A teacher symbolised our relationships metaphorically as a chain made up of all of us; we are all necessary and we have all mutually benefited.

However, for some teachers, the feeling at the end of this first working period had some traces of frustration. One of the teachers pointed out: " I thought it would have raised my expectations to solve the problems we had in a more thorough way". It is possible that we have to accept this paradox in any action-research project since changes do not take place as fast or as easily as we would like them to. It is equally paradoxical that part of their disappointment occurred because the teachers expected the external perspective to bring about changes involving the school context as well as its structural configuration.

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[8] Other meetings have concentrated more on the educational aspect, the analysing documents concerning the action research or comparing our experience with that of other teachers.

As external researchers we always considered the way we manifested our support to the teachers to be important, but also found it a dilemma. This was particularly poignant because the initiative came from us. We had always been aware of the teachers' high expectations and although we understood and tried to make them see that there was little chance of fulfilling them, we could not help feeling responsible and tried to fulfil them as much as possible. Obviously, this is not only reasonable but also legitimate, since we were all participating and mutually responsible for the development of the project. However, we have often wondered whether both ourselves and the teachers didn't implicitly assume -though not in theory- that those who propose the investigation are 'responsible' for it.

Contradictions and tensions in the process of building up collaboration.

- The first point we would like to discuss is the strong relationship between *collaboration and diversity*. As long as collaboration is conceived as a social construction, it must be based on trust and the possibility of sharing interpretations. The difference in professional cultures, pedagogical training, and institutional status and power between participants and researchers as facilitators is both a possibility for enrichment and a constraint on the establishment of flexible and flowing relationships. *"A common factor in all of this action research practice is that the kind of relationship between practitioner and 'outsiders' which is more likely to support the democratic values of action research varies considerably in different cultural settings."* (Somekh, 1995a, p.346)

We are of the conviction that the forms of collaboration between researchers and participants, even within a similar Action Research platform and with the same aim of contributing to facilitate quality improvement of the practice, could be very different depending on the scenario we are faced with. So, in the small rural school *Totalan* we had to virtually disappear as facilitators in order to let the participants develop by themselves, while in the *Fahala trade school* we were forced by the staff to abandon our role as facilitators and take a more direct role as pedagogical consultants.

Participants and facilitators have, because of their diversity of roles, different and even sometimes conflicting perceptions about what is valuable in the research process and in the improvement of practice. These differences are even more acute when the professional culture, expectations and training are so strong that they become a problem of status and power and induce latent and explicit dependence on the part of the participants towards the facilitators as was the case in *Fahala*. On the other hand, professional development and improvement of school management is favoured when the participants share an important body of basic issues: a shared pedagogic philosophy with diversity of perspectives, a close professional culture and training, as was the case in *Totalan*.

" When an outsider is working with a practitioner researcher as a co-researcher or as a facilitator of the research, the roles and responsibilities of both partners also need to be clearly defined. ...the expectations of each partner are grounded in different working cultures and institutional expectations, and there are issues arising from perceptions of differential power and status which needs to be addressed by a formal agreement" (Somekh, 1995a, p.342)

- Secondly, we believe it is important to understand collaboration as *a process of mutual acknowledgement*. According to Sumara & Luce-Kapler "we believe that there has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of collaboration in action research. As a slogan for participatory educational research, collaboration seems to have become aligned with the idea of equal participation, responsibility and representation -all subsumed within a comfortable, friendly community of persons engaged in a mutually interesting project or endeavour" (1993, p. 393).

In the projects presented in this paper we talk of establishing a relationship between university researchers and teachers based on collaboration. But how can we talk of equality when we our interests, education, expectations, academic and /or political pressures and "languages" are

different? Equality must begin by bearing in mind these differences and being aware that these are the principles which underlie any relationship and exchange. The fact that equality should involve acknowledgement of differences does not mean, to begin with, that the interest, expectation or language of one side should be preferred to the other. It is this mutual acknowledgement of our differences and similarities that allows us to establish a commitment to bring forth, discuss and negotiate concepts, ideas and language that ultimately can be shared. This acknowledgement makes possible a fruitful and meaningful collaboration in which every one gains. As Meter & Bruce (1994, p.219) put it "recognising the complementary nature of and the parity in relationships, rather than stressing absolute equality, helps provide for successful collaborations".

- Thirdly, our work makes clear the need to **understand collaboration as a process of building in a democratic way**. Collaboration is not just something to be offered; it is rather something founded and built on a two-way communication which moves away from 'paternalism" and hierarchies. Collaboration means the building up of democratic relationships between participants coming from different backgrounds, and having different expectations, needs and roles who involve themselves in a common project, and know that diversity is not a synonym of inequality. However, building up this kind of relationship is a hard and slow way to go about it, because it means having to learn to "walk". As Aspland et al. (1996, p. 96) point out, "writing about collaboration is much easier than doing collaborative research".

Building democratic relationships between teachers and university researchers involves confronting issues of power and authority, because ultimately we are trying to do research in collaborative ways "within unequal power relationships" (Miller, 1992, p.168). Building democratic relationships involves changing assumptions and judgements deeply rooted in the professional culture of both teachers and university researchers. One of the most obvious assumptions is the split between theory and practice. Researchers are supposed to master theory and so take on the role of experts, while teachers take second place in the relationship In such a situation, the differences are not taken as an opportunity for both to grow, but as a hindrance to'collaboration since one of the parties is the expert and the relationship is totally asymmetrical. The researcher is supposed to be an adviser and use his expertise to resolve the problems and provide the "right" answer... This has been one of the difficulties in Fahala. Besides any other issues at play, the professional culture of the participants and the difficulties encountered in their practice made them to prefer the more hierarchical and controlled relationship. In fact, they could not envisage any other kind of relationship with the researchers.

- A forth issue we have found relevant to the building up of collaboration in the school setting is the strong influence of the *concept of education* each participant has. In both experiences we became aware that if we were trying to build up a way of collaborating, the action research had to be grounded on the educational values of the individuals or groups carrying it out. All of us, teachers and external researchers, were truly committed to create a way of collaboration which could improve the quality of practice, but we also had very different views as to the way to build it up and the process involved.

In *Fahala*, for example, participants wanted to collaborate in a way which they felt they needed, and it was close to their purpose and concept of education: a way to achieve academic results, and the vocational training they were supposed to obtain as efficiently and quickly as possible. As soon as external and administrative pressures began to appear concerning academic achievement, they experienced reflection, discussion, experimentation and evaluation as a waste of time. They lost sight of their initial long term educational purpose aimed at all the students and replaced it for a short term institutional objective aimed at some of them. On the other hand, the teachers involved in the *Totalan* project were more resistant to the external and administrative pressures towards academic performance, defending their concept of education as a way of providing students with opportunities for reflection, and applying theoretical and concept knowledge to the realm of practice and experience.

Both the lack of professional competence and confidence, plus external and internal pressures and obsessions about academic results becomes an obstacle which prevents open and reflective

collaboration, since this takes time, is risky and brings uncertainty. In the *Fahala* case study the institutional constraints on the development of practitioners' knowledge were obviously very strong, in particular the extent to which their pedagogical understanding -the demand for clear and simple recipes to deal with the problems they faced- was socially and culturally constructed in the common pedagogical sense. But as Gadamer (1975), Elliott (1985) and Somekh (1995b) propose this evidence does not invalidate practitioners' action research, but simply becomes a component of the investigation. Prejudices must be brought into play, rather than attempting a bias-free stance as Elliot puts it.

- A fifth issue relates collaboration to the *institutional context.* Establishing a solid communicative platform requires time for sharing interpretations and experiences, expectations and interests. (This has been achieved in the *Totalan* rural school, but has proved very difficult in the *Fahala* case studies). Changes take place slowly. They are not always obvious (one is not always aware of the fact that changes are taking place) and they can affect the perception of the situation considered problematic as well as the way we confront it. The less confident the participating teachers are with their pedagogical practice, the less open to pedagogical innovation they are as individuals, and the less they are, as a group, a coherent, cooperative and supportive team, the more difficult it is to bring about the institutional change and the more uncertainty and anxiety it produces. The school as a learning organisation has to be built on the basis of mutual personal trust and professional competence as well as on the basis of appropriate professional autonomy and a working agenda.

In *Fahala*, for example, despite the open and positive attitudes of the staff involved, the external constraints and the teachers working conditions did not facilitate working as a learning organisation,"...an organisation capable of adapting, changing, developing and transforming themselves in response to the needs, wishes and aspirations of people, inside and outside" (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1991,p.1, mentioned by Somekh, 1995b) They hardly could find the time to meet each other for designing, discussing and evaluating their own pedagogical project, its possibilities and failures. On the other hand we found in Totalan a total identification between the institution and the teachers. The teachers represented the institution. The school develops, learns and improves as long as the groups of teachers working there do so. The reason behind stopping the research is, paradoxically, related to this. At the end of the school year, three of the teachers were leaving the centre. They did so not out of dissatisfaction but to guarantee their professional career at a time of a great general mobility of the teaching staff. And so the institution is at risk of losing its identity if the new teachers do not share its current pedagogical project. And so re-creating the group becomes a primary, indispensable and fundamental task. The teachers staying at the school considered that this task would demand their full attention and efforts and that carrying on with the research was not advisable. It would be incorrect to view this decision as a withdrawal: it was sensible and responsible to do so since it has in mind what really matters to the group: improving and consolidating their pedagogical project.

In a more general sense, changing schools as a whole institution is almost an impossible aim in the Spanish state schools. The way in which teachers are selected as state workers and the way they are appointed to a particular school, only taking seniority into account as the basis for merit, has created a strong, closed and static culture that promotes compliance and individualism in isolation. Only in rural areas, where nobody wants to apply, and in new schools can you find young teachers capable of creating an innovative team. Otherwise, institutional change can be better stimulated in schools through partial and experimental innovation projects with a group of volunteer teachers who promote their own pedagogical views, but respect the work of others.

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